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A HISTORY

OF THE LAST HUNDRED DAYS OF ENGLISH
FREEDOM,

Ending with the passing of the Absolute-
Power-of-Imprisonment Act, in the
month of March, 1817.

Addressed to

Mr. John Goldsmith, of Hambledon, and
Mr. Richard Hinxman, of Chilling,

Who were

The Chairman and Seconder at the Meet-
ing of the People of Hampshire, on
Portsdown Hill, in the month of Fe-
bruary, 1817, to Petition for a redress
of grievances, and for a Reform in the
Commons House of Parliament.

LETTER III.

Opening of the Session.—Speech.—Invi-
tation to Strong Measures.—Attack on
the Prince.—Who contrived it?—
Thanksgiving for the escape.—Lan-
guage in Parliament.—Mr. Dawson
and Mr. Lamb, Lord Milton and Mr.
Elliot.—Affection of these men for the
people.—The people discovered to be
ignorant.—“Lower Orders.”

North-Hampstead, Long-Island,
June 20, 1817.

MY WORTHY AND BELOVED FRIENDS,

As the opening of the session of par-
liament, which took place on the 28th of
January, approached, the hirelings of the
press were more constantly employed in

hinting, that some *rigorous measures* must
be adopted, to keep down what they had
the impudence to call the *disaffected*.
So early as the month of November, they
evinced their alarm, and began, even
then, to endeavour to communicate their
own fears to the timid part of the nation.
There was, however, something so per-
verse in the proceedings of the reformers;
these latter were so provokingly peace-
able and loyal, that Corruption dared not
openly, all at once, talk of violent mea-
sures. She did, through her press, “*cau-*
“*tion* the well affected against our peace-
“*able* language and conduct;” but, she
found nobody but the grossest of the feed-
ers upon the taxes listen to her; and, to her
great mortification, my Register, which
she held forth as a species of political
torch, calculated to inflame not only the
minds of the people, but to produce real
flames in the stacks, and barns, and mills,
and manufactories, and farmhouses, did,
in the precise proportion in which it cir-
culated, produce a directly contrary ef-
fect; and those excesses, which had final-
ly loaded the gallows at Ely, and in Not-
tinghamshire, were no more heard of.

No. 18 had principally this object in
view, and, besides the *Letter to the*
Luddites, written in November, I missed
scarcely a week to inculcate the doctrine
of absolute necessity to avoid all acts of
violence of every sort, and to observe a
strict and real obedience to the laws; nay,
I went so far as to reprobate, in the se-

verest terms, all those who had been, or who were disposed to be, ready to commit acts of violence; which was paying no small compliment to the heads, as well as the hearts of the people, that I could do this, not only without any loss of popularity, but with a vast daily increase of it. I was well aware of all the prejudices of the people against machinery, and of their notions about the extortions of bakers, butchers, &c.; which notions, Corruption's press *was constantly fostering*. But, I knew my countrymen well. I knew, that, if in kind language, they could be made to see their error, they would no longer persist in it; and I relied upon my own talents to produce that conviction in their minds.

I was not deceived in this reliance, and the nation will bear witness, that, from the time that I began to write upon this subject, a total change took place in this respect; and that I did more, in the space of a month, to prevent depredations of this sort, than all the new penal laws, all the magistrates, and all the troops, had been able to do in seven years; and to prove this, there were fifty magistrates ready and willing to come to the bar of the parliament. Why, then, did WILLIAM GIFFORD and SOUTHEY; why did these two sinecure reviewers so bitterly lament, in their Quarterly Review, that the people "*swore by, lived by, and were ready to die by,*" my Register? Could they, could these sinecure holders wish for the *peace* of the country? Yes, they really did wish for the peace of the coun-

try; but, they had a wish which stood higher than this: that of *keeping their sinecures*, which was wholly incompatible with doctrines that I preached.

And, as to the hirelings of the press in general, they too wished for the *peace* of the country, if it could be kept, and if their system could, at the same time, go on. But, in exhorting the people to keep their hands from committing violence on their innocent neighbours; in *proving* to them, that their sufferings did *not* arise from those imaginary petty causes, I was compelled, and was perfectly disposed, to prove, that these sufferings *did* arise from the great load of taxes, joined to the deadly effects of a paper money, varied in its value by the will of the managers of that money; and, when I came to speak of the cause of the existence of these overwhelming evils, I was obliged to ascribe them to a want of reform in parliament, and to exhort the people peaceably and legally to petition for such reform.

This it was that stung Corruption to the quick. She did not wish for bakers' and butchers' mobs; for they might end in mischief to her upon some occasion or other. She wished still less for attacks upon machinery, and upon corn stacks; but, very, very far indeed, did she prefer these to peaceable, and legal, and numerous composed meetings and petitions for reform, for these were most formidable attacks upon herself. Many persons said to me, in the months of Novem-

ber, December, and January, "What impudence it is, Mr. Cobbett, in these men, to say, that your publications are *inflammatory*, and calculated to set the poor upon the rich, when they so obviously have a different tendency, that we, in our county, take great pains to put them into the hands of our working people." I remember, particularly, that this was told me by gentlemen from Norfolk, from Cambridgeshire, from Nottinghamshire; and at Leeds I received a vote of public *thanks* for this effect of my writings. But, as I used always to observe to those who made these observations to me, my writings really were *"inflammatory;"* for, they inflamed the people against the corruption, bribery, fraud, and perjury, which had been the great cause of all their miseries; and I inspired them with an anxious desire to remove this cause for ever; and this it was that Corruption meant when she called my publications *inflammatory* and *sedition*, and called upon the rich to rally round the *throne* and religion, by which she meant the profits of those who lived upon the labour of the people, and who were the greatest enemies of religion, as well as of the throne.

"And how in God's name," honest people used to exclaim, "can they have the impudence to accuse you of teaching *blasphemy*, and of wishing to destroy the *church*, when you, on the contrary, exhort the people not to make religion a subject of dispute or discussion, and when you are the only lay-man in the

kingdom, who, having any degree of popularity, has ever ventured to risk it by saying that *tithes* do not make a part of the sufferings, of which the people complain?" The hirelings must, indeed, have been the most impudent of mankind to make this charge; but, any thing was resorted to. *Blasphemy* was a good word for their use. It served them, as a man once told me of the Bank notes. "Depreciated, or not depreciated," said he, pulling a handful out of his pocket, and thrusting them forward towards my face, "they serve us." And, true or false, the charge of *blasphemy* served corruption. Besides, to wean the people from all religious *bickerings* was to hit her no common blow. She has long most essentially benefitted from these bickerings and divisions: *divide and subjugate* is one of her great maxims: nothing suits her turn better than to have contending sects continually appealing to her as the arbiter of their pretensions, and to keep all in awe by the fear each has of her giving privileges to any other which she denies to it.

My writings tended to sweep away for ever this source of influence; they tended to withdraw the attention of the people from these petty disputes; they tended to make them one firm and united body in the cause of Reform. From all quarters and corners I called them to listen to me. I raised the standard of plain common sense, of sound reasoning, intelligible language, and the whole people gathered around it.

This it was that alarmed Corruption, and she soon began to discover her uneasiness, and her press to throw out hints; that "*something must be done*" to counteract the *poison* that was *weekly* going forth to the people in "Two-Penny Trash publications." Day after day she grew more uneasy. She cut all sorts of capers. Like Nick Frog, in Swift's works, she cursed, she cried, she swore, she seemed, at last, as if she was ready to cut her own throat. Her hirelings still kept bellowing for *something* to be done. Stewart, of the Courier; Walter, of the Times; William Gifford and Southey, of the Quarterly Review, and hundreds of others; but, these four men in particular, whose *names* and whose *conduct* we shall, I hope, never be so base as to forget; for that would be a crime such as ought not to be forgiven in us, and our country ought to perish, if these men were not called legally to answer for their deeds. These men in particular, Corruption's forlorn-hope, came, at last, about a month before the Parliament met, to call for *new laws* to protect the Constitution against the "Two-Penny Trash." New laws to protect the Constitution against *trash*! When they were called upon to *answer* this *trash*, they declined, as BURKE declined to answer PAINE, whom he called on Mr. ATTORNEY-GENERAL SCOTT, to answer! The pensioned hack was stung to madness by PAINE, and, in the House of Commons, where PAINE was not to answer him, he actually called upon the Attorney-General to silence his opponent. Gifford, and Walter, and Southey,

and Stewart, followed, in the same path; but, in this case the Attorney-General found he had *no power*. Hardened as the system had become; great as was the severity added to the libel laws since the time of Paine and Burke; great as the encroachments had been on the liberty of the press; still, as Lord Sidmouth afterwards confessed, the law-officers could find nothing in the Two-Penny Trash to prosecute with a chance of success. The case being, therefore, more desperate than in the time of PAINE, more desperate was to be the remedy; and, accordingly, *my opponents* recommended, not prosecutions by the Attorney General, but *new laws*, which they called for upon the ground, that we had laws to prevent the sale of *putrid meat*, and other *poisonous* things, and that we *ought* to have laws to prevent the vending of *poisonous* publications; and, of course, they themselves, or other Sinecure Placemen, or Tax eaters, were to be *sole judges* of what was, and what was not poisonous. These prostituted, these shameless men, were the harbingers of the acts which were afterwards passed; and, as I said before, *they must never be forgotten*, while we, or our sons, are alive.

The subsequent measures were, therefore, resolved on, without doubt, weeks before the Parliament met; and, as we shall presently see, it was quite clear, that the attack upon the Prince's carriage in the Park, only added an incident to the grand drama, all the parts of which were before prepared and carefully distributed.

Indeed, Lord Castlereagh said expressly, that the measures about to be proposed, would have been proposed, if that attack had *not* been made; and, it would have been in vain to hold out the contrary, seeing that those measures were but too plainly pointed out in the Regent's *speech*, which, be it remembered, had been delivered *before* the attack was made. Yet was this attack a *great incident*; and, though it was clear, that the acts would have been passed without its assistance, it is nevertheless true, that it formed the grand feature in all the future harangues about the "*Demagogues*," as we were called, and the almost sole topic in the Declarations of the Tax-eaters, and in the diatribes against the Reformers from the pulpit. Nay, in the very *Thanksgiving* itself, which was put up in the churches, this attack was deduced as the *natural consequence of our principles*, though those principles were of a nature to render them proof against the Attorney-General with all his sharp-sightedness and all his power.

So great having been the use made of this attack, it is necessary to inquire a little here into the circumstances of it, in order, if we can, to come at something like a guess at its real origin. There were in London, at that time, about *seven* *ty persons* from different parts of the country, with petitions for reform. They had brought up, some of them only *one*, and others 20 or 30 petitions each. It was expected that Sir FRANCIS BURDETT, whose name had been affixed to a circular,

inviting deputies to come to London from petitioning bodies in the country, would attend, and carry down these petitions to the house. In this the deputies were disappointed. He was not in London; and, came to the house that day *in a post-chaise directly from the country*, without any deputy, or any reformer having an opportunity to see him, before he entered the house, of which I shall have to say more by-and-by.

Here, then, were these deputies, with positive orders to deliver their petitions to Sir Francis Burdett; here were these sincere and honest men, as anxious for the success of the cause as if their lives had depended on it, running about the town half mad, not knowing where to go, or what to do. Seeing that there was no sign, at eleven o'clock in the day, of the arrival of SIR FRANCIS, MR. HUNT, about that time, set to work to collect together all the bearers of petitions from the country, which, with some few exceptions, he succeeded in doing. The place of assembling was Charing Cross; and from this spot they moved in procession, the *Bristol Petition*, signed by more, I believe, than 27 thousand men, being opened, and carried at their head, while a bundle of oak sticks, emblematical of *union* and *strength* was borne on an oak staff before the bearers of the Bristol petition.

In this order the procession moved, down Whitehall and Parliament-street, to the house of Lord Cochrane, which

was in New Palace Yard, directly opposite the grand entrance of Westminster Hall. His Lordship here received all the petitions; and, the deputies, together with, perhaps, 20,000 people, having waited till it was time for Lord Cochrane to go to the house, they forced him into a chair, and thus they carried him to the Hall door, with the Bristol petition in their arms, in a roll of parchment about the size of a tolerable *barrel*, and with the bundle of oak twigs in its belly, all which his lordship manfully presented to the house, who *received* the petition, and permitted it to *lie upon their table*, where it still lies, in the legal construction of the thing, ungranted its prayer, undiscussed its contents, and unanswered its allegations.

The circumstances are very important, because, as they are notoriously true, so they amount to a very strong presumptive proof, that the attack on the Prince did *not* originate with the *reformers*, who were proceeding down Whitehall towards the house of Lord Cochrane at the very time that that attack was made. If *they* had meditated any such attack; if they had wished it even; would they have been absent from the scene? And, besides, if this had been the case, would not the fact have come to light, with all the *rewards* that were offered, and with all the activity of the police magistrates and their innumerable host of spies?

With *whom*, then, did this attack originate? That is the grand question. Now,

observe, there were crowds, whole brigades of magistrates, police officers, spies, constables, in the Park, besides soldiers, horse and foot, the former surrounding the coach eight or ten deep, and no part of the coach which was not bullet-proof, except the glasses of the two doors, and they half an inch thick. Under these circumstances, how was the glass to be hit by stones thrown at it, without some of these brigades of attendants *seeing* the person who flung the stones; and without their taking them instantly into custody? One man of the name of Scott, was taken up, but it was not *alleged* even that he had flung any stone. As to the idea of the *bullets*, that was soon laughed off the stage, when it was found, that if they did enter, they entered on one side, *and went out again through the passages by which they had entered*, for, that they were not to be found in the coach; and, what was very surprising, Lord WILLIAM MURRAY, who came to inform the Parliament of the attack by bullets, had not thought it worth while before he came to examine the coach to see whether any bullets were there! No report of fire-arms had been heard by any one; no one had seen any body but the soldiers with fire arms in his hands; a stone indeed had been fairly found in the coach; and, still it was alleged, that the attack had been made by *bullets*; and, though this was almost instantly laughed at, still the idea of *bullets* was so precious, that, two days afterwards, it was attempted to be revived by a statement in the papers, that a Mr. Such-a-one had *picked up a bullet in the Park*, and sent it to

Lord Sidmouth's office ! Drawings were given in the papers, said to be copied from an *original made by the Prince himself*, of the square of glass, of the perforations made by the bullets, and, it was gravely shown, from Professor Somebody's experiments, that bullets might make holes through a thing *without going through it themselves*.

In short, there were no bullets, as all the world was soon satisfied ; and the *uncommon pains* taken to make out the fact, by no means tended to do away some suspicions, which, amongst well-informed men, arose in their minds, the moment they heard of the attack, but which suspicions did, I dare say, never enter the mind of the Prince himself. *Who*, then, could it be that *instigated* this attack ? It was clearly not the reformers, unless we can suppose, that they had the power to *depute* the assailants ; and, what is more, unless we can suppose, that they secretly wished to defeat their own cause ; for, what could have happened better for the ministers and the borough-gentry ? Indeed, it was very *opportune* ; so very *fortunate* for them, that I heard a fundholder say, that it had *saved the nation* ! What an idea ! An attack on the sovereign, alleged to have proceeded from a desire of part, at least, of his people, to *take away his life*, calculated to *save* the nation ! Yet, such was the general sentiment, and such the general talk, amongst all this tribe, who, thereupon set to work to draw up and to issue *declarations*, ascribing this "*treasonable and damnable*"

act to the reformers, and pledging their lives and fortunes to *stand by his Royal Highness and the Constitution*. Then followed the *thanksgivings in the church*, and the thundering ; no, not the thundering, but the roaring from the pulpit, against *instigators, agitators, and evil-minded and designing men*.

Leaving you to guess, now, my honest friends, *who* it was that really instigated this attack, and to bear in mind, that, in spite of all the facilities for so doing, *not one flinger of a stone has ever been discovered*, though great rewards were tendered for such discovery, and a great parade made about these rewards : leaving you, as I safely may, to form your own opinions upon this subject, I shall now go back to the Parliament, and see what they were doing there.

From the speech of the Prince it was easy to foresee, that the advice of Walter, William Gifford, Southey, and Stewart, was intended to be adopted to the very letter ; and that, as there were *laws* to prevent the selling of *putrid meat*, lest the bodies of his Majesty's loving subjects should suffer thereby, so we were to have laws to prevent Two-penny *Trash* publications from *poisoning* their minds. His Royal Highness, in the close of his speech, had this *ominous* passage :

" In considering our internal situation
" you will, I doubt not, feel a just indig-
" nation at the *attempts* which have been
" made to *take advantage* of the distresses

" of the country, for the purpose of ex-
 " citing a spirit of *sedition and violence*.—
 " I am too well convinced of the loyalty
 " and good sense of the *great body* of his
 " Majesty's subjects, to believe them ca-
 " pable of being *perverted by the arts*
 " which are employed to *seduce* them;
 " but I am *determined* to omit no precau-
 " tions for *preserving the public peace*,
 " and for counteracting the *designs* of the
 " *disaffected*: and I rely with the utmost
 " confidence on *your cordial support and*
 " *co-operation* in *upholding a system of*
 " *law and government*, from which we
 " have derived *inestimable advantages*,
 " which has enabled us to conclude, with
 " unexampled glory, a contest whereon
 " depended the best interests of mankind,
 " and which has been hitherto felt by
 " ourselves, as it is *acknowledged by other*
 " *nations*, to be the most perfect that has
 " ever fallen to the lot of *any people*."

If we had time for sport, or, if these
 transactions were not of too serious and
 important a nature to permit us to indulge
 in any disposition to levity, we might
 here find abundant matter for amusement.
 But, leaving these "*inestimable advanta-
 ges*" to be discovered in the present state
 of a country, which is so over-run with
 paupers as for the poor rates to demand
 aid from Exchequer Bills; leaving the
 Ministers, who wrote this speech, to dis-
 cover *what* nations those "*other nations*
 are" who acknowledge the Borough-
 System to be the "*most perfect that ever*
 has fallen to the lot of *any people*;" and
 leaving them, also, to say *what* was the

wisdom in pointing out the excellence of
 laws, the remaining good ones of which
 were all *about to be suspended*; let us
 come to the subject of the "*disaffected*,"
 and of the "*designs*" and "*arts*" here
 alluded to.

It was well known; it has been a hun-
 dred times proved, that there were none
 of the *Reformers* who had any *designs*
 which were not openly avowed, and
 which were no other than the Duke of
 Richmond had had thirty years before;
 and, so far from the agitation of the ques-
 tion of Reform having produced a spirit
 of "*sedition and violence*," it had notori-
 ously produced the *contrary* effects. No-
 body is bound to prove a *negative*; no-
 body is bound to prove his *innocence*;
 every man, and every body of men, are
 held to be innocent till they are *proved*
 to be *guilty*. But, we were in the singu-
 lar situation to be able to prove a nega-
 tive in our favour; for, while there
 had been riots in parts of the king-
 dom, where there had been *no* pub-
 lic Meetings for Reform, there had
 not, throughout the whole kingdom,
 been one single act of violence com-
 mitted where there *had been*, or where
 there were about to be Meetings for
 Reform.

The Speech, indeed, did not *speak* of
 the *Reformers*, but it spoke of a reliance
 on "*the cordial support and co-operation*
of the Parliament;" and, it was not
 very easy to see what these were need-
 ed for, while the Attorney-General was

in full power, and while the Ministers had at their command an army of 150,000 men. If, however, any one could have doubted of what was intended, the speeches of the members, on *both sides* of the House, as it is called most whimsically, would have left no longer any room for the shadow of such doubt. The mover and seconder of the address, the leading Members of the Opposition, all agreed in reprobating the Reformers, and that unfathomably profound gentleman, Mr. LAMB, who is called one of "the gentlemen opposite," most eagerly volunteered his support of the "firm-handed" measures which he anticipated, and which, in his *sweet-breathed* accents, he said he would be for, because they would be *for the good of the people themselves!* Thank you, sweet Mr. LAMB; and, if we do not demonstrate our gratitude in something more solid than thanks, towards you and towards the rest of "the gentlemen opposite," by no means forgetting Lord MILTON, Mr. Wm. ELLIOT, Mr. WYNNE, and many others, we are all well assured that you will take the will for the deed, and that you will give us credit till the time shall come when we may be able to repay your kindness, principal and interest. Mr. LAMB, with his usual profundity, took occasion, by way of parenthesis, to say that he would not touch the property of the Fundholder. Stick to that, Mr. LAMB! He said, that the land-holders had been ruined, and that having done the people no good, it followed, *of course*, that the touching of the funds would do no good,

but would produce new ruin. This is *Oxford* learning. This is the hereditary wisdom of Mr. LAMB, who, if he had been a "Weaver Boy" of Lancashire, never could have any such brilliant thoughts come into his head.

Now it was that the gathered stone poured down upon us, and more especially upon *me*. Every one had some stroke at the *Cheap Publications*; the *Poisonous*, the *Venomous*, the *Deadly Weekly Publications*. There was too much *pride* remaining to *name my Register out-right*. But, there was not pride enough to prevent a resort to those circumlocutory shifts, which amounted to exactly the same thing as a downright calling me by name; and the whole nation saw that the sole drift and object were to stifle, by some means or other, the influence of the Two-Penny Trash Publications. Great pains were taken to disguise this; but all would not do. The people had foreseen that this *must* be done, or *that a Reform must take place*; and a resolution to refuse the latter amounted to a proof of an intention to make a desperate attempt to do the former.

Still, it was pretended, as in the Speech, that "the *good sense* of the *great body* of his Majesty's subjects was such "as not to leave room to believe that they "were *capable* of being *perverted* by the "acts of the disaffected." Not very good *English* this, 'tis true, but much worse reasoning; for, if the *great body*

were sound and well affected, and not *capable* of having their minds perverted, what need was there of this *fright*? Why was the "cordial co-operation of the Parliament called for?" And why did these gentlemen make such a lamentable outcry against the *Two-penny Trash*? But, then, as Mr. LAMB so *sweetly* said, it was necessary to adopt firm-handed measures for the *good of the people themselves*. Yes, sweet Mr. Lamb, but, while the *great body* were sound, was it necessary to enable the Secretaries of State to cram into dungeons anybody whom they pleased, not excepting this "great body," whose *good sense* made them absolutely *incapable* of yielding to seduction? Some legislators might have thought sufficient to enable the Ministers to cram into dungeons those who should be found to be amongst the "*disaffected*;" that is to say, legislators of a moderate degree of zeal and affection; but, so great was your zeal and affection for the people, that you volunteered your aid, though you were one of "*the gentlemen opposite*," to assist the Ministers in this work of kindness towards the people; accordingly you were *ballotted* upon the never-to-be-forgotten Committee!

This sentiment of wondrous *affection for the people*; of wondrous zeal for *their good*; this amiable sentiment seems to have been uppermost in the breasts of the whole of the actors in this memorable scene. Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Canning had *principally* in view their love of the Constitution and of the liberties of the people. That plain, frank, and sin-

cere old Nobleman, the Lord Chancellor, almost shed tears, while he declared (and took God to witness of the truth of what he said) that it was his love for the Constitution and of the liberties of the people, that alone could induce him to give his consent to these measures. That ponderous statesman, the Marquis of Buckingham, and his no less ponderous uncle, said the same; while that future pillar of his country, as the sycophant, BURKE called him, LORD MILTON, though he voted for all the Bills but the *Power-of-Imprisonment Bill*, did not think that any degree of affection for the constitution and for the liberties of the people called upon him to go quite so far; and, as his father (Burke's main national pillar) had gone the whole length, the newspapers told us, that the tender hearted LORD MILTON was "*deeply affected*" in expressing his dissent from the Dungeon Bill. However, the right honourable W. ELLIOTT, who is, in a *parliamentary* sense, as closely connected with LORD FITZWILLIAM as LORD MILTON himself is; this right honourable gentleman, whose very figure bespeaks benevolence and warmth of heart, and each of whose dimples brotherly love would seem to have chosen for its abode; this right honourable gentleman carried his love to the full length of Dungeon Bill and all; and, if any thing farther could have been proposed, I dare say, that his ardent love of the constitution and of the liberties of the people, would have urged him on to follow the propositions. In answer to all which expressions of tender regard, the people might have answered that these worthies had "*an odd way of*

"*showing it.*" When they told us, so often, that they were really, at bottom, only anxious to prove their love to the constitution and to our liberties, though they might *seem* to be passing acts against both, we might have answered in the words of an old French epigram, the former part of which I have forgotten, but, in the latter part of which, (being translated into English,) a young girl, all in tears, says to her lover,

I excuse you, my dear, for *dissembling your love* ;
But, why need you *kick me down stairs* ?

The *compassion*, too, that these kind gentlemen expressed for the *deluded few*, was very striking in its character and effects. There were only a *few* of the *deluded* ; and yet these gentlemen would put the *whole nation* into the absolute power of the ministers, for the purpose of preserving these few from the delusions practised upon them. They would, and they did, pass a law enacting a *new treason* ; a law making it *death* to attempt to seduce a soldier from his duty ; a law to enable the magistrates to open, or shut up, at their pleasure, all *reading rooms*, all *lecturing rooms*, all *circulating libraries*, and to grant or refuse assent to the *petitioning* the parliament itself at any public meeting ; and, finally, to drive the people of Westminster away from their old place of meeting to petition. All this these gentlemen did, besides enabling the ministers to shut up in prison whomsoever they pleased, in any jail that they pleased, and for any length of time they pleased, without suffering the parties so

shut up to see, or to correspond with, their wives, children, or friends. All this these kind gentlemen did ; and that, too, from their extreme *affection* and *compassion* for the "*deluded few* !" There were, indeed, *laws*, and these pretty severe ones too, already in existence for punishing whoever might, by writing or speaking, inculcate what was called *sedition* and *blasphemy* ; but, while these laws remained *wholly unappealed* to ; while none of "the designing men" were attempted to be made amenable to these laws, the *compassion* of these gentlemen for the "*deluded few*" induced them to hasten to propose new laws, which embraced every class of the community.

Infinite pains were taken, in these speeches at the opening of the Parliament, to send forth the idea, that the persons, who had been *seduced*, that is to say, the persons who had met and petitioned for a Reform, were nothing but an *ignorant rabble*. This was very inconsistent with the alarm that they had excited, and the serious measures, which were clearly intended. It was completely answered by the wonderful stock of knowledge and of talent, which had appeared at those meetings. But, for reasons too obvious to mention, it was thought necessary to ascribe the demands of the people to *ignorance*. To have called them all *perverse* or *disaffected* would not have suited their purpose. Therefore, it was to *their ignorance*, and to the *craftiness* of their *seducers* that the alarming evil was to be ascribed ; though

the arguments of the former were not, and were never intended to be attempted to be, refuted, and though the latter had never been called in question by the law. Yet did Mr. DAWSON, who seconded the Address in the House of Commons complain of the "*delusive* appeals of those, who, under the *pretence* of a redress of grievances, were found haranguing large assemblies of the people, on topics, which were quite above the comprehension of the vulgar."

I wonder what topics these could be? The usual topics were Sinecures, and unearned Pensions and Grants; the Civil List; the sums voted annually for the relief of the "Poor Clergy," of the richest Church in the world, while Mr. *Malthus*, one of that Church, was crying out against relieving poor labourers, because it was a premium for population. Other topics were, the injustice of making the nation pay interest in a high currency for debts contracted in a low currency, and for salaries at the old rate, when the price of labour had so greatly fallen. And, above all, the people discussed the topic of trafficking in seats.

Now, it may be matter of doubt, perhaps, with some persons, though it is none with me, whether there were a score of labourers in England, who did not understand all these topics as well as Mr. DAW-

SON did; but, if they did not; if they were ignorant, and, if the matters discussed really were above their comprehension, how came the discussions to have produced so strong an impression upon their minds, that it was necessary to endeavour to efface it by four most tremendous Acts of Parliament? We never find, that much impression is produced on the mind of a man by the hearing, or the reading, what he does not understand; and hence, I suppose, the few converts that are made by the sublime speeches which the English people might, if they had nothing better to look at, read in the news-papers, during one half of every year. Talk, or write, nonsense to a man, and you will make no impression upon him other than such as disposes him to laugh. Talk even sense to him, in a language that he does not understand, and he stares at you, but that is all. But, the people, in this case, must have been addressed in a language which they understood, and they must have pretty clearly comprehended the matter too; otherwise, why these extraordinary; why these monstrous efforts, to reduce to silence those who are called their seducers?

It is curious to observe, too, how the estimate of the people's understanding varies, in the opinions of men like Mr. DAWSON, as the tendency of the people's efforts vary. BURKE called them a "*Swinish Multitude*," while he held forth Lord

Fitzwilliam and his son as the Nestor and the Telemachus of the day. This was at a time when the people were, many of them, calling for an end to the trafficking in seats. But, when, in four years afterwards, they had been, in some places, especially at Manchester and Birmingham, induced by false alarms, and by various other tricks, to form themselves under the rich to pull down Jacobins' houses, and to burn Mr. PAINE in effigy; then they became all at once very rational and sensible people; and Sir ROBERT PEELE, the Manufacturing Baronet, in answer to Mr. Fox, who had said, that the government ought to be ashamed of having instigated these Church and-King mobs, said that the " Rt. Hon. Gentleman was much deceived in his estimate of the character of the labouring classes, as far, at least, as related to the county, with which he had the honour to be connected. They were not a very loyal class of persons, but an enlightened class of persons, who were not to be misled by any writings or any speeches, however artful. The pamphlet of PAINE had produced no impression on them. They wanted, they said, no French fraternity. They preferred their religion and their legal freedom, with the good solid roast beef of old England to the atheism, the liberty and equality,

" and the broken breeches and frog-soup of France."

Well, now, either this was the character of the people in 1794, or it was not. If it was not, Sir ROBERT PEELE was what I need not name; if it was, why is not this character now, after 23 years of Bible Societies, Lancaster Schools, Bell's Schools, and after all the boastings that we have heard about the wonderful progress that has been made in the work of enlightening? It was their general character in 1794; no doubt of it; and, it happens, too, that Sir Robert spoke particularly of that same county of Lancaster, the people of which have now shown so much public spirit, and so strong a desire to produce a Parliamentary Reform. And, if Sir Robert spoke truth, when he described the labouring classes in Lancashire 23 years ago, why should they be regarded as mob and rabble now? Why should Mr. Dawson suppose, that the divers matters discussed at their late numerous meetings, were quite above their comprehension? The truth is, that the general capacity of the people is the same as it was in 1794. They have, however, since that time, received a great deal of information; and, to this it is, that we are to ascribe the change in their way of thinking, and in their conduct, as to po-

litical matters. And what do they want more to enlighten them as to these matters, and to produce this change, than the *experience* of the last 23 years? And, at any rate, can they be called *inconsistent* in their change, when they see that that same "roast beef of old England," to which Sir Robert said they were so much attached, has been exchanged, not for "the *Soup-meagre* of the French," but for *butter-milk and brewers' grains*, which are actually now the food of a part of the people of that same county of Lancaster, the *Soup-Subscription Kettle* being a thing beyond the reach of many, many thousands?

Besides, who amongst all the sons and daughters of corruption, who have been writing pamphlets to the "*Lower Orders*," should pay 10 pounds in taxes out of every 18 pounds of their earnings, while Lord Such-an-one was receiving 20 or 30 thousand pounds a year out of those same taxes; this was a "topic quite above the comprehension of the vulgar," was it? There are passages in the Bible of not more than two or three verses, to expound which more volumes have been written than would fill Westminster Hall, to say nothing of the burnings, the rackings and the wars, which have arisen out of these disputes. Yet, the Bible has been sent

out amongst the people with so much zeal, that servant men and maids have been, by circular letters, and by all kinds of means, invited, under pain of almost perdition in case of refusal, to subscribe their penny per week toward the funds for circulating this book. And yet, questions of plain matter of fact, all depending upon proofs close at hand, are above the people's comprehension! But, then, the Bible does not treat of sinecures; of unearned pensions and grants; of a double interest for a debt; of standing armies in time of peace; of trafficking in seats, and of a Parliamentary Reform.

For many years past, there had been such a fuss made about *enlightening* the people, and about the wonderful success of the projectors, that it seemed, only about eight months ago, that there would not be a man left in the country who would not be a small-beer philosopher, at least. To enlighten the people was Mr. WHITBREAD's grand scheme for *reducing the poor-rates*. To enlighten the people was Sir SAMUEL ROMILLEY's means of *preventing crimes*. The enlightening of the people was to produce every good, and check every evil. The work of enlightening went on; schools sprang up in every corner; the Church vied with the Dissenters; all were at work enlightening the people. Meetings, and dinners, and speeches, without end: reports, sub-

scriptions, lists, proofs of the good effects. In vain did I say, that it would be better to give the poor *bread*, or, rather, to *let them eat it when they had earned it*, and leave them to enlighten themselves out of *their own means*. I was abused for this, and represented as a man who *wished to keep the "Lower Orders" in ignorance*. Nothing was thought of but enlightening the people; and, their improvement at home had, at last, brought them to so perfect a state of light, that the projectors began to cast their eyes *abroad*, and there was actually founded a "*British and Foreign School Society*," with one of the Royal Dukes at its head.

One would have expected, therefore, that *ignorance* in the people would have been amongst the last things to be alleged upon this occasion. But, when the people in Lancashire began to meet, and to discuss the great questions of *national interest*, it was discovered, all at once, that they were a set of *ignorant weaver-boys*! And this was absolutely necessary, too, or else the charge of *seducers* must have died of itself. In short, it was necessary to say that the people were *ignorant*, or to acknowledge that their petitions ought to be attended to.

The truth is, that the great mass of the

labouring classes had become *really* enlightened as to matters that were not only within their full comprehension, but in which every man of them was most deeply interested. This light they had derived chiefly from *experience*. And, indeed, if the picture that their country presented at the close of a war, which they had been told was for religion and liberty, and which had restored the Pope, the Inquisition, and the Jesuits; if that picture, which, instead of promised plenty and happiness, was a picture of such misery as was never before beheld in the world; if that picture had not enlightened them, their capacities must have been dull beyond that of any of the natives of Africa, not excepting the monkeys and baboons, or our less-enlightened fellow-subjects of the Cape of Good Hope. To the aid of this great teacher, Experience, was, however, added that of the *press*, and especially the "*Two-penny Trash*," publications, which, as I before observed, were the great object of the Borough-mongers' dread.

To this it came at last; and, whatever shifts were resorted to in order to disguise the fact, this, and this only, was the cause of that celebrated GREEN BAG, of the contents of which, of the manner of examining those contents, and

of the whole mode of acting upon that examination, I shall treat in my next; and, in the meanwhile, in good health, and in the midst of an abundance of cherries, and with pine-apples to eat at 1s. 6d.

English, each, I remain, my worthy and beloved friends,

Your faithful friend,

WM. COBBETT.

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